
Rail

Overview and Table of Contents

This section provides information about rail and high capacity transportation used in or being planned for the state. High capacity transportation systems may include heavy, light, or commuter rail, but also may include other elements such as exclusive busways.

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Freight Rail

BACKGROUND

- There are two class 1 railroads operating in Washington State: the Burlington Northern & Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway and the Union Pacific (UP) Railroad.
- Several smaller shortline railroads operate within the state. These railroads generally serve local shippers and communities with links to the large class 1 railroads. The following companies and rail districts operate shortline railroads in Washington: in Eastern Washington - Blue Mountain, Camas Prairie, Palouse River and Coulee City, and Pend Oreille Valley; in Central Washington - Tri Cities Railroad, Columbia River and Cascade, Columbia Basin, Royal Slope, Toppenish Simcoe and Western; in Western Washington - Columbia and Cowlitz, Tacoma Rail - Mountain Division, Puget Sound and Pacific, Lewis and Clark, Meeker Southern and several switching terminal railroads.
- Importance of freight rail to Washington State economy:
 - Encourages competition among modes to keep freight rates reasonable. In Congressional testimony, it was noted that all freight rates drop an average of 20% if there is viable rail freight competition.
 - Reduces long haul truck traffic on state's highways, reducing highway preservation costs and congestion
 - Supports Washington businesses and rural development – freight rail investments are often major job generators
 - More energy efficient mode; environmentally clean

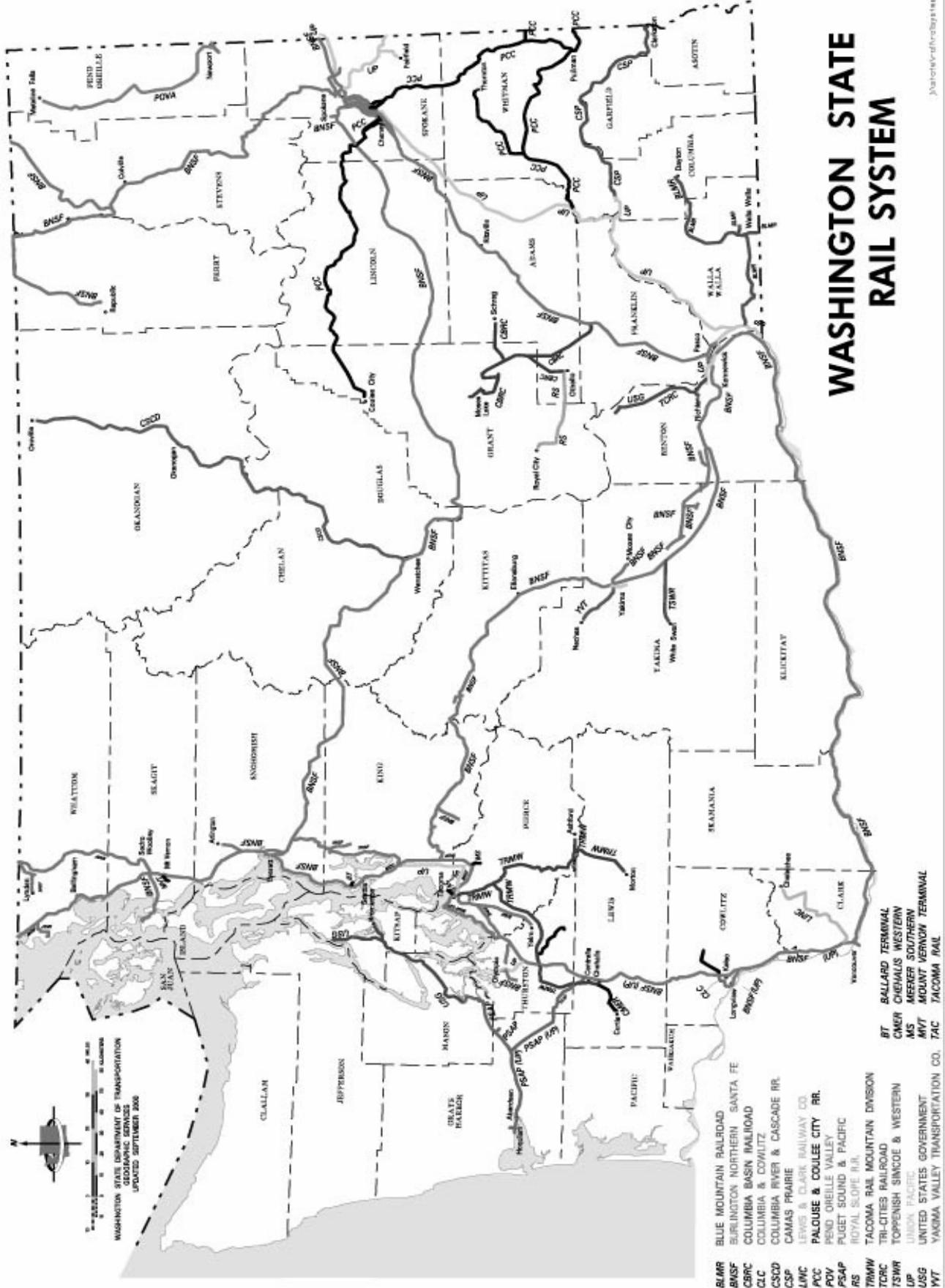
GOVERNANCE

- WSDOT is responsible for developing and implementing Washington State's rail plan and programs

FUNDING

The following public funding sources are available for freight rail:

- Essential Rail Assistance Account (RCW 47.76.250):
 - Low interest loans and grants that provide financial assistance to cities, counties, ports and short line railroads to preserve existing light density rail lines and service
 - Rail assistance loans and grants have become some of the most effective job creation tools for the state – availability of rail service is often mandatory when bidding for new family-wage industries
 - Loans and grants to cities, counties, or ports to purchase rail corridors, including trackage, for future freight rail service (rail banking)
 - In addition, the state may purchase a line for future rail use (rail banking)
 - Funds administered by WSDOT Multimodal Transportation Account
- Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Grants:
 - No new federal funds have been available since 1995, though there have been some occasional federal earmarks.
 - WSDOT has given out very few small new loans and grants using repaid Local Rail Financing Assistance (LRFA) funds. The loans were distributed prior to 1995 and were repaid to a special state-controlled account.
 - Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing Program
 - Program available September, 2000
 - \$3.5 billion in loans and loan guarantees, with a minimum of \$1.0 billion reserved for non-class 1 railroads
 - Loans can be for up to 25 years in duration at 30 year Treasury note rates
 - Loans supported by pre-payment of a credit risk premium
 - Initial loans took years to obtain FRA approvals; the first one was given to an Oregon short line in September 2002. Seven have been given out as of September 2004.
 - Less restrictive requirements may be enacted in 2004



High Capacity Transportation (HCT) System Development

BACKGROUND

- Transit modes that operate primarily on exclusive rights-of-way
- Includes light rail (e.g., Portland's MAX system), heavy rail (e.g., BART in the Bay Area), and exclusive busways (e.g., Pittsburgh or Ottawa busways)
- Provides a substantially higher level of passenger capacity, speed, and service frequency than traditional public transportation systems
- Currently, the Regional Transit Authority (RTA), covering most of King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties, is the only HCT system in Washington

GOVERNANCE

- The RTA will develop and operate the HCT system in King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties. Voters approved the RTA financing plan in November 1996.
- The Joint Regional Planning Committee (JRPC) was an organization of 20 elected officials and WSDOT representatives, which was formed by interlocal agreement and planned a public transportation system for the central Puget Sound region. The JRPC was succeeded by the RTA.
- In areas outside central Puget Sound, joint regional planning committees direct the planning for HCT systems.

FUNDING

- In addition to the RTA, transit districts in Thurston, Clark, Yakima, and Spokane counties are authorized to levy voter-approved taxes for high capacity transportation systems (RCW 81.100.030, 81.100.060):
 - Employer tax of up to \$2 per employee per month
 - Local option motor vehicle excise tax of up to 0.8% except on large trucks (Repealed by I-776)
 - Sales and use tax of up to 1% (limited to 0.9% if 0.1% sales tax for criminal justice has been imposed in county)
- The RTA funding plan, approved by voters in November 1996, includes 0.4% sales and use tax and 0.3% motor vehicle excise tax (Repealed by I-776)
- HCT taxes may be used for planning, constructing, and operating high capacity transportation systems, including commuter rail and feeder transportation systems
- Provides up to 80% state match from High Capacity Transportation Account for high capacity transportation planning
- Revenue from the following local option taxes authorized in 1990 (Chapter 42, Laws of 1990) may also be used for HCT systems (RCW 82.80.020, 82.80.030):
 - License fee
 - Commercial parking tax

Intercity Passenger Rail (AMTRAK)

BACKGROUND

- The WSDOT is developing a high-speed rail passenger program in the state to accommodate increasing intercity travel demands. The Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor from Vancouver, B.C. to Eugene, OR is designated under Section 1010 of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) as one of five nationally designated corridors to be developed for high speed rail passenger service.
- Ridership on WSDOT/Oregon DOT/Amtrak-sponsored service in the Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor (Amtrak Cascades) has risen from 94,000 in 1994 to nearly 600,000 in 2003
- National Railroad Passenger Corporation (also known as Amtrak) was formed by Congress in 1970 to operate rail passenger service
- Amtrak provides intercity passenger service in Western Washington with connections to Central Washington, Eastern Washington, the Midwest, and California destinations, with total passenger volumes at Washington Amtrak stations exceeding 1,000,000 in 2003
- Operates on 900 miles of Burlington Northern Santa Fe track in the state and provides service to 14 cities; three statewide corridors provide service between Vancouver, B.C. and Portland, Seattle and Spokane, and Portland and Spokane

GOVERNANCE

- WSDOT is responsible for developing and implementing Washington State's passenger rail program as specified in RCW 47.79

FUNDING

- The following funding sources are available for the passenger rail program:
 - State Transportation Fund and the Multimodal Transportation Account
The 2003-05 transportation budget included an appropriation of \$40.3 million from the Multimodal Transportation Account to carry out the following state passenger rail efforts:
 - ◆ Operate two daily roundtrips between Seattle and Portland; one daily roundtrip between Seattle and Vancouver, B.C.; and one daily roundtrip between Seattle and Bellingham.
 - ◆ Complete one environmental impact statement (EIS) and continue another; a Record of Decision was issued by FHWA in 2003 for the Vancouver Rail Project, and work continues on the EIS for the Kelso to Martins Bluff Rail Project. Both projects will create faster and higher capacity infrastructure to further the corridor passenger program.
 - ◆ Complete two crossovers near Tacoma to support an additional daily round trip between Seattle and Portland.
 - ◆ Complete other corridor projects designed to improve schedule reliability.
 - Federal Funds
 - ◆ No federal funds are received for either passenger capital or operation.
 - ◆ Federal support for rail may come in the TEA-21 reauthorization of 2004-05.
 - ◆ WSDOT receives federal funds from the Federal Highways Administration, the Federal Railroad Administration, and the Federal Transit Administration only for grade crossing improvements and station improvements.

